



Post-Soviet Maskirovka, Cold War Nostalgia, and Peacetime Engagement

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The leopard cannot change its spots, or so goes the old saw. This seems to be the case with republics of the former Soviet Union in the military-diplomatic arena. Tim Shea reveals how these republics still use the old Soviet strategy of maskirovka—measures that deceive, distort, mislead, and misinform—to counter the effects of U.S. peacetime military engagement.

A military operation involves deception. Even though you are competent, appear to be incompetent.

—Sun Tzu

MASKIROVKA is a component of statecraft—a diverse spectrum of stratagems employed to distort the enemy's view of Soviet positions, designs, and missions and to alter the perception of their own side and their clients as well. Maskirovka, simply defined, was a set of processes employed during the Soviet era designed to mislead, confuse, and interfere with anyone accurately assessing its plans, objectives, strengths, and weaknesses.¹ This Soviet concept included, but was not limited to, deception, disinformation, secrecy, and security.² Since independence almost 10 years ago, the world has not witnessed large-scale purges or witch hunts of former Soviet or party officials in countries such as Russia, Ukraine, Georgia, Moldova, or Uzbekistan.

The reinvented communist nomenclatura, as heads of state and chiefs of the power ministries in

most of the former republics, has adapted maskirovka to protect its new nonideological self-interests. The Soviet successor states use passive and active measures of maskirovka in varying degrees to their advantage to manage aspects of bilateral relationships with the United States to serve their own ends while resisting or subverting U.S. shaping efforts. The rise of the reinvented Soviet Committee for State Security (KGB) security organs to prominence and power, the crippling effect of rampant corruption, and increasing state control of the media have inhibited the deepening of U.S. bilateral relations in the region.³ Maskirovka is used to counter the effects of U.S. peacetime military engagement.

Peacetime Military Engagement

A unilaterally imposed fog of war that distorts the truth for both external and domestic consumption clouds peacetime military engagement inside these countries. Maskirovka permits regional military leaders to feed on U.S. freebies while feigning interest in transparency, professing pro-NATO strategic orientations, or claiming support for

Ukraine's Chief of Air Defenses Volodymyr Tkachov and Defense Minister Oleksandr Kuzmuk telling reporters on 13 October 2001 that a Ukrainian missile fired during a training exercise may have been responsible for the 4 October destruction of a Russian airliner over the Black Sea. Ukrainian officials had earlier maintained that a missile could not be responsible for the crash.



Wide World Photo

In Russia and Ukraine, the Kursk submarine sinking and destruction of an apartment building in Brovary Tochka by an errant missile illustrated how even ministers of defense routinely lie in a clumsy attempt to control information. . . . NATO expansion, the Partnership for Peace Program, and the plethora of related activity have helped the huge military bureaucracy of former political officers find a niche as de facto administrators or as journalists handling military engagement activities with their former ideological foes.

democratic models. These symbiotic, or even parasitic, bilateral relationships have evolved to conceal the fact that many post-Soviet leaders depend on, even in partnership, forces and interests that view real reform as a threat to their place in society. In some cases, official and criminal structures have effectively merged.

The strategic ambiguity that has followed the end of the Cold War has given birth to a concept whereby the United States engages the world to influence and advocate adopting Western ideals. While many might consider it pretentious to think the United States could have dictated what happened in the former Soviet Union, the United States often readily assumes blame for all that has not gone well. All too often, when planning or executing engagement activity, maskirovka is ignored or viewed as a minor irritant instead of the countermeasure it really is.

The engagement lobby plays a large role in this debacle and exists on both sides. These interest groups benefit almost entirely from the money and

missions processes as bureaucracies, but they have no stake in actually measuring progress or achieving concrete results. As individuals and organizations, these groups tout numbers of events and quantities of programs as indicators of progress. Because the activity is largely funded externally, engagement activity can justify creating and maintaining organizations to administer these programs and associated hefty increases in personnel authorizations. Examples include the Army National Guard State Partnership Program and the U.S. European Command Joint Contact Team Program (JCTP). On the former Soviet side, decentralized groups work with and without ministry of defense (MOD) approval to squeeze resources out of the engagement program, often with tacit approval from their counterparts in the engagement lobby.

For example, the JCTP's stated mission is to deploy teams made up of U.S. military Reserve component and active duty members to selected countries of Central and Eastern Europe. It assists their militaries as they transition to democracies with free market economies. Developed in 1992, the program's stated purpose is to assist the armed forces of emerging democracies of Central and Eastern Europe as they develop into positive, constructive democratic societies that are apolitical and non-threatening, respect human rights, and adhere to the law. The JCTP prides itself on the absence of regional specialists or area expertise because such specialists are unofficially considered to be contrary to the spirit of openness and transparency. The result is a huge, ineffective bureaucracy that does not know how to recognize or counteract maskirovka. A menu of very basic events is executed over and over again to familiarize former Soviet officers on various military topics to little or no effect.

A Culture of Lies

Hardened realpolitik has long since replaced the early days of post-Cold War sentimental optimism. "Show us the money" attitudes prevail as the countries on the east side of the old Iron Curtain each considers its strategic importance to the United States as paramount. The Soviet experience imparted a culture of deceit on those societies, particularly on the military. Lying routinely occurs at the most senior uniformed levels, even when an argument is clearly untenable or contradicted by obvious facts.

In 2000, in Russia and Ukraine, the Kursk submarine sinking and destruction of an apartment building in Brovary Tochka by an errant missile illus-



Members of a combined Baltic platoon practice recovering personnel from a minefield under the watchful eye of their U.S. Marine trainer during Cooperative Osprey 96. The exercise included three NATO and 13 PFP nations.

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trated how even ministers of defense routinely lie in a clumsy attempt to control information.⁴ Such old-thinking officers are not accustomed to accountability or having the veracity of their rhetoric challenged. Increased censorship, both military and civilian, helps to minimize criticism, discourage open debate, and ultimately defeat reform efforts. NATO expansion, the Partnership for Peace (PFP) Program, and the plethora of related activity have helped the huge military bureaucracy of former political officers find a niche as de facto administrators or as journalists handling military engagement activities with their former ideological foes. A small minority of Western-thinking, progressive officers are simply outmatched, outnumbered, and overwhelmed under these dreary circumstances and repugnant leadership.

The Real Peace Dividend

Peacetime military engagement delivered a huge windfall profit to the shadow economies operating inside the various MODs after the Soviet Union's demise and the end of the Cold War.⁵ U.S. support

for NATO's PFP Program has exceeded \$590 million during the past 7 years according to a new study from the General Accounting Office.⁶ According to the report, former President William J. Clinton's administration provided \$165 million in assistance outside the framework of the Warsaw Initiative but within its objectives. Established in 1994, the PFP has offered defense-related assistance to 22 former communist states in Europe and Central Asia. This is not to say the money has been wasted, but it is no small sum and understandably would be attractive to the cash-strapped governments in the region.

In theory, peacetime military engagement has merit. The idea is for the United States—more specifically, the Department of Defense—to make relatively small, timely investments in activities that might yield disproportionate benefits in terms of limiting or preventing crises that might require a more substantial, costly response later. In practice, these former apparatchiks frequently use maskirovka to persuade unwitting U.S. counterparts to grant lucrative spoils associated with U.S. fully

funded military engagement activities such as trips abroad, computers, or direct reimbursement for suspect expenditures that claim to support bilateral engagement activity.⁷ These Soviet-bred senior leaders are frequently successful in absorbing and diffusing efforts to influence their behavior. The

Frequently, the post-Soviet senior policymakers on the other side of the table are reinvented security officials who, through their actions, define policy as protecting state secrets and hiding official corruption. These ideologues are the gatekeepers who aim to siphon, divert, or misdirect resources away from the intended target on behalf of oligarch masters in uniform.

United States often lacks the sophistication to recognize the inappropriate effects and undesired consequences of throwing resources and programs at the problem without a thorough evaluation.

Cold War Nostalgia

The good old days of unquestioned political loyalty and censorship, and the dominance of the KGB are probably gone for good, but these elements have been transformed to serve the same masters. The primary instrument of control in the Soviet armed forces was the Main Political Directorate. This organization maintained a vast structure, with significant representatives at every organizational level, and had its own chain of command and reporting. In each military unit down to company level, a deputy for political affairs, or zampolit, assisted the commander.⁸ Not the same as a regular officer, the zampolit served the Main Political Directorate in both the MOD and Communist Party structures. The zampolit was formally tasked to organize and conduct political work, participate in planning for combat and political training, cultivate loyalty to the Soviet motherland and Communist Party, and conduct propaganda among the soldiers on communism's successes and hating their enemies.⁹

Ironically, in many cases, these political commissars are now responsible for monitoring loyalty and conducting indoctrination along national lines within their MODs. These officers, along with security services, are primarily responsible for managing bilateral engagement portfolios with the United States. The unique systems of politico-military controls of Marxist-Leninist principles have degenerated into a crude instrument for corrupt senior officials to culti-

vate personal loyalty and to obscure a realistic picture of condoned activities to outsiders. The national KGB successors maintain close contact and cooperation with counterparts throughout the former Soviet Union that transcend sovereignty.¹⁰

The discredited communist ideology may have gone underground, but the supporting infrastructure has survived intact. The zampolit position has evolved into a position with a new title and similar responsibilities without the communist ideology—deputy commander for indoctrination or, literally, upbringing work. Frequently, the post-Soviet senior policymakers on the other side of the table are reinvented security officials who, through their actions, define policy as protecting state secrets and hiding official corruption.¹¹

These ideologues are the gatekeepers who aim to siphon, divert, or misdirect resources away from the intended target on behalf of oligarch masters in uniform. Most senior officers, as products of the dysfunctional Soviet system, developed essential survival skills based on the principles of maskirovka. Especially in the absence of ideology, maskirovka has proven useful in misrepresenting strategic orientations, masking political ideology, and hiding corruption. These worst of the worst—opportunists with absolute, unchecked power—were not expunged, not swept away. Their continued presence in senior positions of responsibility is especially harmful.

The Fatigue Factor and Managing Maskirovka

Can peacetime military engagement be rehabilitated? Most who are intimately involved have become jaded and frustrated, but not all have given up hope in recognition of the long-term challenge of these acute problems. As President George W. Bush's administration produces its own national military strategy to replace the "shape, prepare, respond" trilogy, it will be forced to examine ways to adapt peacetime military engagement to the current ground truth in the former Soviet Union. At this juncture, such a review is long overdue. Alienation has crept into bilateral relations because of unfulfilled expectations on both sides. Progress has been unsteady and inconsistent. Desperate requests for materiel and financial assistance unabatedly continue. Approaching 10 years of independence, these countries are largely motivated to participate in engagement activity in its present form for the economic benefit or to gain a positive advantage with the increasingly hegemonic United States and

NATO. Others are playing Moscow against Washington. Subtle and organized resistance has stymied reform efforts.

U.S. offers of assistance often are no longer appreciated because of lesser funding and fewer resources when compared to the recent past. Frustration reveals itself in many ways. For example, Congress recently voted to cut funding to Ukraine for Fiscal Year (FY) 2002 from \$175 million to \$125 million because of its lack of progress on economic reform and human rights. Ukraine's leaders are outraged and feel entitled indefinitely to the status quo of \$175 million. Anything less is viewed as an insult. U.S.-funded renovation projects, whether for humanitarian purposes or to support PFP peace-keeping exercises, often regress to blatant extortion campaigns. Military bosses insist on cash payments at commercial rates for shoddy MOD construction and substandard materials to finance their corrupt activities.

Recognizing this serious problem, the United States, since FY 2000, has provided goods and services (instead of direct reimbursement for exaggerated costs incurred) to support PFP exercises through contractors who are required to use competitive bidding. Resistance has been fierce and unrelenting. The situation is analogous to the Philippines where, in 1992, after a combination of uncompromising Philippine financial demands and an overestimated sense of its strategic importance led U.S. forces to pull out fully. Today, the Philippine government is much more

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appreciative of common bilateral interests.

Bribing foreign rulers to gain cooperation or compliance is an ancient, legitimate tactic. In situations where the problem is not corruption in the system but, rather, that corruption is the system, this approach will not work. Developing counter-measures to defeat maskirovka begins with recognizing that such a problem exists. Overcoming maskirovka requires more energy and greater attention than just allocating resources and developing programs. Regional experts must be involved from top to bottom to continually assess the effectiveness of the engagement program. Ten years after the fall of the Soviet Union we can no longer afford to have amateurs involved in crafting and executing these expensive programs. Maskirovka must not be ignored—it is an asymmetric threat. “The success or failure of international propaganda or disinformation depends on the willingness of the audience to be deceived.”¹² **MR**

NOTES

1. According to the 1978 *Soviet Military Encyclopedia*, maskirovka is “A means of securing the combat operations and daily activity of forces; a complex of measures designed to mislead the enemy as to the presence and disposition of forces and various military objects, their condition, combat readiness and operations and also the plans of the commander . . . it is a concept that combines the use of cover, concealment and camouflage, operational security deception and misinformation. Strategic maskirovka is carried out at national and theater levels to mislead the enemy as to political and military capabilities, intentions and timing of actions. In these spheres, as war is but an extension of politics, it includes political, economic and diplomatic measures as well as military.”
2. Richard H. Schultz and Roy Godson, *Dezinformatzia: Active Measures in Soviet Strategy* (Washington, DC: Pergamon-Brassey, 1986), 37. Dezinformatzia is usually an active measures technique. Strategic disinformation assists in executing state tasks and is directed at misleading the enemy concerning basic questions of state policy, military-economic status, and the policy of certain imperialist states with respect to each other and other countries and the specific counterintelligence tasks of the organs of state security. It can contain both true and false information leaked to an opponent, intending to deceive decisionmakers rather than the public at large.
3. Serhiy Zhurets, “The Army Attacks Internet and Simultaneously Toughens Censorship,” *Ukrainian Daily Den* (24 March 1999), 2.
4. Minister of Defense Igor Sergeev and other top Russian officers provided contradictory and untruthful information on the Kursk submarine sinking in August 2000.

5. Peacetime military engagement is defined as all military activities involving other nations intended to shape the security environment in peacetime. See Joint Publication (JP) 3-16, *Joint Doctrine for Multinational Operations* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office [GPO], 5 April 2000), I-9.
6. Emily Woodward, “GAO Reviews U.S. Financial Contributions to NATO Partnership for Peace,” *Defense News*, 24 July 2001.
7. JP 1-02, *Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms* (Washington, DC: GPO, 12 April 2001) defines security assistance as “a group of programs authorized by the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961, as amended, and the Arms Export Control Act of 1976, as amended, or other related statutes by which the United States provides defense articles, military training, and other defense-related services, by grant, loan, or cash sales in furtherance of national policies and objectives.”
8. Christopher N. Donnelly, *Red Banner: The Soviet Military System in Peace and War* (Coulson, Surrey: Jane's Information Group, 1988).
9. U.S. Army Field Manual 100-2-1, *The Soviet Army: Operations and Tactics* (Washington, DC: GPO, 16 July 1984), 3-6.
10. Masha Gessen, “In Russia, Echoes of the Old KGB,” *US News & World Report* (30 July 2001), 28.
11. For example, the Deputy Minister of Defense for Policy in Ukraine, General-Colonel Viktor Bannykh is a professionally trained KGB officer brought into the MOD in 2000 to fill this new position. See his official biography at <http://www.mil.gov.ua/biogr/auto_ban.htm>.
12. *The New Image Makers: Soviet Propaganda & Disinformation Today*, Ladislav Bittman, ed. (New York: Pergamon-Brassey, 1988).

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